

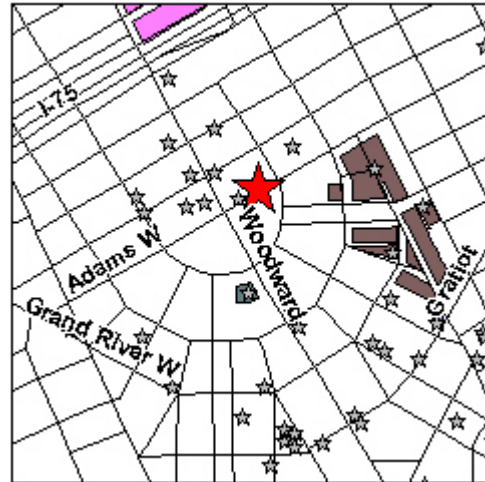
## **Women's Exchange Building**

47 W. Adams

Local                    ✓            2/18/83  
State  
State Marker  
National



**Women's Exchange Building**



### **Historic overview:**

Women's Exchange and Decorative Arts Societies were established in large cities all over the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as places for women to sell their work at a fair price. The Women's Exchange and Decorative Arts Society in Detroit was established in the early 1880s, and reestablished in 1888 at a meeting held in the McGraw-Lightner House at 1708 E. Jefferson. Members were well-to-do ladies who would sell consigners' wares for the best price they could; the Women's Exchange received a 15% commission. The consigners were women who had once been well off but due to circumstances had to face the problems of how to survive. Before becoming a consigner, a woman had to supply references stating that she was in need of help. They could bake cookies, do needlework, and the like at home and have it sold at the Women's Exchange. Shirtwaists, lingerie, and exquisite fancywork were among the items produced.

The Women's Exchange was first located at 222 Woodward in one-half of a florist shop. After several moves, it located to E. Adams in 1916. (John R. Williams, who was Detroit's first mayor in 1824, originally purchased the lot at a government auction in 1809.) The money to remodel the building was neither from contributions or endowments. As a result of its popular noon lunches and thriving catering service, the Women's Exchange in Detroit was totally self-sufficient. Before its final move it had 385 women consigners and 52 employees. The building was redesigned to harmonize with a church at the corner of Woodward and E. Adams.

The organization ceased operations in 1942. After 50 years of service it felt it had fulfilled its goals. The Women's Exchange was more than a social organization—it was a place where women helped women through difficult financial periods.

